



Agriculture discussion deemed success

By MISTY MAYNARD Staff Writer

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Money seemed to be the primary concern of those gathered for a round table discussion at the Mason County Extension Office Monday.

The group, consisting of farmers and agricultural representatives from several counties in the area, met with representatives from the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy to discuss agricultural development funds, and the various options they have to receive funding for their different ventures.

Many of the farmers present were one-time tobacco farmers looking to diversify, while others, like Dee Potter of Lewis County, are concerned with greenhouse products. Potter was concerned mainly with the marketing of such products now that more farmers are turning to greenhouse and vegetable production and saturating local counties with their products until there's almost no demand.

"The Phase I (tobacco settlement) program is probably one of the best things that ever happened to the state of Kentucky," Potter said. "I do think the state is lacking on the marketing end."

Potter said that while many people are seeking other options besides tobacco production, few know how to "move it."

"Our area is becoming flooded with greenhouse and vegetable products," he said. "An area can only move so much product."

Once the area is saturated, farmers need to be able to send their products out to areas beyond the immediate counties, Potter said, and need assistance in marketing their goods and finding ways to move it past the established boundaries.

The round table discussion was the fourth of 13 the representatives from the Office of Agricultural Policy will hold. Keith Rogers, the executive director for the office, said it was a method through which area residents could provide feedback, both positive and negative, to the office.

Other issues covered during the meeting included the genetic improvement program which garnered comments concerning the administrative requirements of the program as well as some of the changes implemented this past year, and incentives to promote woodland management and better timber quality.

Questions were answered, and clarifications were given regarding the programs and how area residents can apply.

Mason County Extension Agent Bill Peterson said the round table was a "success," noting there were people present from Greenup, Robertson, Bracken, Nicholas, Lewis, Fleming, Carter and Rowan counties, as well as Mason County.

"It's a sounding board back to the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy," he said.

"Tonight is for us to listen to you all," Rogers said in his introductory statements to the group of about 35 people



Farmers and other representatives from several counties attended the round table discussion Monday with the Governor's Office of Agricultural Policy to voice their concerns regarding current programs and funding available. Staff photo

gathered at the office. He asked them to share their thoughts on what is going right, wrong and what the office can do to ensure the agricultural economy moves ahead.

Rogers said the group gathered in Mason County was the largest crowd the group had encountered so far, and said he was pleased with the comments after the session concluded.

"This is what we wanted," Rogers said. "This is their chance (to share) the good, bad and ugly about the programs."

Potter said he felt like he had gotten across those issues he needed to share, and hopes the issues made an impression on the three representatives present.

"I think there were more concerns here tonight than optimism," he said.

Joining Rogers from the office were Brian Furnish, the deputy director, and Nick Whobrey, project analyst for the area. Rogers first discussed past state and county funding, and where it might be heading in the future, noting that the amount of money available is, for the most part, declining. He also explained the five programs rolled out last year, which include timber, technology, swine diversification, shared-use equipment and dairy diversification model programs, and said he's been pleased with the amount of involvement and participation in those programs.

He also spoke about non-model programs, and the Kentucky Agricultural Finance Corporation.

"You may not be aware this is a program we have taken over," Rogers said to the group. He said the group will be utilized as a lending entity for agricultural diversification.

In the beginning, Rogers said, two programs were created, the Beginning Farmer Loan Program and the Agricultural Infrastructure Loan Program, and he explained the specifics behind each.

Rogers also shared a pilot Satellite Broadband Cost-share Program, which would provide high-speed Internet access to farmers who meet the qualifications of receiving the aid. The program would pay half of the cost of equipment and installation, as well as half of the broadband service cost for a year, not to exceed preset limits of \$250 for installation and \$40 per month for service costs.

Rogers encouraged those with suggestions for changes to also write the office, and said all information gathered at the meetings will be used later in determining program changes and funding.

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